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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR EB/TRA; WHA/CAN; WHA - EVELYN WHEELER
DOT FOR AVIATION AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NEW CANADIAN TRANSPORT MINISTER INTERESTED IN
EXPANDING AVIATION AGREEMENT, ACCELERATING BORDER
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS, AND TIGHTENING PORT SECURITY

REF: A) OTTAWA 2876 B) OTTAWA 2766

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1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met Minister of Transport Jean Lapierre on October 26 and learned his views on upgrading the bilateral aviation agreement and accelerating infrastructure improvements at land border crossings. The Minister indicated he will push for both, and that port security will be assigned a high priority while he is in office. The Ambassador and Minister pledged to keep in close contact and to work together on strengthening U.S.-Canada transportation links and border security activities. End summary.

2. (SBU) On October 26 the Ambassador met with new (since July 2004) Minister of Transport Jean Lapierre. The Ambassador wanted to make an initial courtesy call and congratulate the Minister, and seek clarification regarding press reports of early October (reftel B) indicating that Lapierre wished to further liberalize the 1995 U.S.-Canada air transport agreement.

3. (SBU) Lapierre told the Ambassador that with Air Canada now on its feet, the Government of Canada (GOC) is ready to pursue an enhanced aviation agreement. (Note: On October 1 Air Canada emerged from 18 months under creditor protection. Septel follows. End note.) Lapierre said he had told Cabinet that Transport Canada (TC) would prepare a formal proposal for how the GOC should proceed in improving the aviation agreement. Lapierre plans to present this proposal to Parliament's Transportation Committee and ask its members to consider it. Subsequently, TC intends to publicize a final, polished proposal (incorporating Parliament's input) and organize nation-wide public debates on its merits. Lapierre views an expanded aviation agreement with the United States as "a non-partisan issue" and is confident that all parties would join the present minority government of Paul Martin in endorsing an enhanced agreement--if the Canadian public signals it believes such an agreement is in its interest. Lapierre promised to provide more details of the TC proposal after it has been vetted with Parliament. Lapierre added that Canada will follow with interest U.S.-EU aviation negotiations with a view to determining how U.S.-EU issues might impact negotiation of a new GOC-U.S. agreement.

4. (SBU) Turning to the land border, the Ambassador reported that DHS Secretary Ridge and Deputy Prime Minister McLellan had a successful October 14 meeting which produced many deliverables. Significantly, both the U.S. and Canadian sides had identified the Windsor-Detroit border crossing as "a critical area" that required attention. The Ambassador noted that the two leaders agreed on the need to meet personally with the stakeholders and affected communities to demonstrate high-level commitment and identify viable solutions. (Comment: As reported in reftel A, Ridge and McLellan, or their representatives, are expected to visit the region within the next three months. End comment.) Minister Lapierre remarked that he had visited the area three weeks ago. He was surprised to be told that the long-term solutions can't be operational before 2013. "That's too long," the Minister said. The Ambassador expressed agreement. The Ambassador continued that in the interim, until the long-term solutions are decided upon, the two governments should implement short-term fixes for the congestion at Windsor-Ontario, such as the recently opened new booths that had markedly increased traffic flows. Another short-term remedy might be conversion of the railway tunnel to a truck tunnel. The Ambassador suggested that Canada and the U.S. should also look at alternative modes of transport, such as short-sea shipping to handle all-cargo ferries. Lapierre agreed.

5. (SBU) Regarding plans for Transport Canada during his tenure, Minister Lapierre said that port security is his first priority. Lapierre recalled that during several years as a news broadcaster in Quebec, he reported frequently ("every two weeks") on problems at the Port of Montreal. He

said that he wants to see more secure port operations at Montreal. He observed that the registration process for port workers requiring background and security checks is a good step and one that is endorsed by the teamsters and dock workers themselves. Lapierre urged that the clearance STATE FOR EB/TRA AND WHA/CAN process not be implemented too quickly, however, or too many port workers might abruptly lose their jobs. The Minister said that five percent of current employees do not pass the clearance process, and he asked if the United States is having a similar problem with clearing port workers.

16. (SBU) The Ambassador and Minister Lapierre discussed other positive U.S.-Canada joint activities, such as registration of passengers for NEXUS-air in Vancouver and Seattle, Canadian partnership in the container pre-screening program at the Hong Kong port, and the joint operations between U.S. CBP officers and their Canadian counterparts in container targeting at Montreal. In closing, Minister Lapierre said that they had covered all the ground except railways, and he proposed that the U.S. and Canada work more closely on this mode also. The Ambassador agreed.

17. (SBU) Comment: Minister Lapierre seems enthusiastic about his portfolio. He appears to recognize both the challenges and the opportunities that present themselves in dealing with Canada's southern neighbor. With a new government in Canada and a revitalized Air Canada, the GOC may determine that the time is right to review the aviation agreement with the U.S. We will follow events and attempt to facilitate progress in the U.S.-Canada transportation and border security relationship. End comment.

18. (SBU) (FYI: The GOC just announced appointment of a senior experienced intelligence officer as the Minister's new Senior Advisor for Security--another hopeful sign that the GOC will take transportation security more seriously.)

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